

From Editor and Publisher dated 22 September 1951

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RIDICULOUS, ISN'T IT?

"NOTHING will damage the cause of those who are fighting to lift the veil of secrecy from official business more than the easy acquiescence of the Fourth Estate itself in this off-the-record mania.

Yet we find this "thing" carried to its ridiculous extreme at the recent convention of the New York State Publishers Association at Lake Placid. Even the chairman was embarrassed with his obligation to introduce a speaker with the caution (fore and aft) that everything was off-the-record. As if it wasn't enough that "Off Record" was noted in italics on the printed program for the banquet!

And who was the speaker? Why, he was a government official, of course. Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, assistant to the director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Amid all this hush-hush atmosphere, with dining room doors wide open, Mr. Kirkpatrick, who was a newspaperman himself once, gave a perfunctory account of the CIA operations. His chief pitch appeared to be solicitation of newspapermen for CIA jobs.

His audience of some 300 persons included editors and publishers and also their guests — newsprint, ink and machinery salesmen — with wives, daughters, sons, and a lady visitor from Holland. How many in the guest category, we wonder, have a professional understanding of the confidential obligation imposed by an off-the-record stipulation?

If Mr. Kirkpatrick had said anything explosive or had divulged any secrets of our national defense there's no doubt that even the bears on Whiteface Mountain would have gotten wind of it.

When the American Society of Newspaper Editors meets in Washington there are occasional off-the-record sessions. But the situation is different: there you have a controlled audience of society members, admitted only by membership card; and the audience is composed wholly of professional newsmen who know the obligations of the stipulation.

Our point here is that publishers should not permit government officials to speak off-the-record when there is no excuse or reason for it, when nothing is said that couldn't be "on-the-record", and when any unknown person could be in the audience to violate the stipulation if something revealing or important was said.

Newspapermen, and above all, publishers should oppose the off-the-record technique which is being carried to ridiculous extremes."